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## Health Promotion—Advice for Women

COUNSELING HEALTHY WOMEN on how to remain healthy includes reminding them to fasten their seat belts, update their immunizations, and limit their coffee, alcohol, and other drug consumption, as well as discussing smoking cessation and weight maintenance or reduction.

Smoking should be forcefully proscribed. Smoking as few as one to four cigarettes per day is associated with a twofold increased risk of fatal or nonfatal myocardial infarction in women. Women who smoke are at increased risk for cancer of the lung, larynx, bladder, pancreas, and perhaps both in situ and invasive carcinoma of the cervix. Smoking reduces fertility, increases the rate of spontaneous abortions, increases the incidence of placenta previa and abruptio, and retards fetal growth, resulting in infants with a lower average birth weight. Even more alarming are the data that suggest that there may be a long-term effect on children as a result of maternal smoking during pregnancy. The damage to children as a result of passive smoking is well documented, as is the increased incidence of skin wrinkles in their mothers.

Exercise should be liberally prescribed by physicians.

Weight reduction programs that incorporate regular exercise improve a woman's chances of maintaining weight loss. Not only are calories expended but appetite is decreased, perhaps as a result of increased levels of endorphins. In addition, exercise increases the metabolic rate for several hours after the exercise period has concluded. Improved cardiovascular fitness, lowered blood pressure, and a better lipid profile also accrue to women who exercise regularly. Perhaps most important, there are psychological benefits, and women can be reminded that pursuing fitness can be fun.

Finally, to promote a woman's continued good health, clinicians are well advised to educate their women patients about safe sexual practices. As the incidence of some sexually transmitted diseases, including human immunodeficiency virus infections, rises, the need for open and frank discussion becomes more compelling.

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*What if in my waking hours a sound should ring through the silent halls of hearing? What if a ray of light should flash through the darkened chambers of my soul? What would happen, I ask many and many a time. Would the bow-and-string tension of life snap? Would the heart, overweighted with sudden joy, stop beating for very excess of happiness?*

Helen Keller